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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was devised and mailed to 84 township school districts in New Jersey to determine how often each adopted new basal reading series, the extent of teacher involvement in the selection process, and whether a detailed questionnaire was used as a basis for evaluation of different basals. A Likert scale was used to grade responses. Results showed that although many township school districts did not have any set policy regarding a change in or review of book series, the districts that did reexamine their series did so within the fifth or sixth year of series use. Findings also indicated that teachers were actively involved in the selection process and raised many areas of concern when choosing new books. Finally, respondents indicated that they most often used detailed questionnaires as a method for evaluating new series. (A copy of the questionnaire used in the study is appended.) (FL)

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A Study of How Often a Township Changes Basal Series and The Methodology and Criteria Utilized in the Selection of a New Series

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by

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for the Masters of Arts degree
Kean College of New Jersey

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Abstract

A questionaire was devised and sent out to eighty-four townships in New Jersey to ascertain how often a township changes basal series: the extent of teacher involvement in the choice of a new basal series, and if a detailed questionaire is used as a basis for evaluation of various basal series. The Likert Scale was used to grade responses. The results indicated that a new series is chosen approximately every five years; teachers feel that they should be involved in the choice of a new series and that a detailed list of criteria should be applied when choosing a new series.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a major concern of both parents and educators. Declining S.A.T. scores of the past years and publicity on the "back to basics" trend in education has made the public increasingly cognizant of the importance of reading and math programs. Therefore, the development of an effective comprehensive reading program that incorporates the philosophies, objectives and goals of a township's educational system is of major concern to pupils, parents, and educators. A basal reading series is usually chosen as a vehicle for meeting these needs.

What does a basal reading series encompass? Otto and Smith (1980) suggest that most of the major reading seires in the market place reflect similar philosophies about how reading should be taught. Very simply, they help teachers teach children a vocabulary of words which they then recognize on sight; various word-attack and comprehension skills; how to talk about stories, poems, essays, whatever; and how to use reading for information getting and for pleasure. Jean Chall, (1967) states in her book The Great Debate that the basal program is an attempt by publishers to give teachers and pupils a total reading program embodying a system of teaching reading (in the teachers' manuals), a collection of stories and selections for pupils to read (the readers), and exercise and additional practice (the workbooks).

The basal reader has become one of the most important elements of the average American school program. Research by Ruth Robbins (1980) shows that basal reading programs are used in 80% to 90% of

American schools and represent the most commonly used approach to reading instruction in this country. Sara Zinet (1969) concurs by stating that there has been a growing body of experimental data pointing to the tremendous impact the content of reading texts has been on a child's life-space. Not only is the content of these first readers seen as a possible contributing factor in reading retardation; it is also seen as a transmitter of our cultural value and attitudes.

How large an imput do publishing companies have in determining educational content? Investigation by Robbins has shown that basal reading text sales are generated by only a handful of publishing companies. These publishing companies are directly affected by factors of cost and censorship and potentially control what is available in basal readers. If certain aspects of a textbook are objectionable, for what ever reasons, it is inevitable that sales will suffer. The child may end up being the consumer of an unrealistic view of life that is based upon the self-proclaimed "high standards" of a small group of educators who happen to be responsible for a large quantity of sales. EPIE (1981) adds that a great many curriculum decisions are left in the hands of the developer/publisher such as: decisions about the goals and objectives of the materials; decisions about the scope and sequence of its content; decisions about what specific teaching and learning activities will be built into the material in order to facilitate the learning of the material's content by learners, and decisions about whether to build into the material a means of assessing a learner's progress through - and mastery of - the material's objectives.

Choosing a basal series requires a large outlay of funds and it is therefore assumed that the series will be actively used for a number of years. Who is to make the choice of the new series and what criteria are to used? Herbert Wartenberg (1977) suggests that in many cases, a good salesman can do the job singlehandedly. In other instances bright colors, varied illustrative techniques, and shape and size become the determinants. Olsen (1968) has suggested the use of a checklist or a questionaire and has reported that he and his coworkers at Wayne State University have identified more than two hundred principles that could be used in selecting materials. Lory Johnston (1980) has offered a wide spectrum of areas to be considered for evaluation, covering program authorship; program philosophy; readability of materials; content of materials; the way the program provides for development in such areas as phonemic and structural analysis, vocabulary comprehension, creativity, literacy understanding and appreciation, language growth, study skills and acquisition of knowledge; student evaluation methods; teacher editions, and teacher aids (skills workbook).

A recent Gallop Poll published Phi Delta Kappan (Sept. 1982) posed the following question: "Who do you feel should have the most influence on the selection of books for use in public school classrooms and school libraries-parents, school boards, teachers, or the principals and school administrators?" Of the national totals, 42% chose teachers, 18% chose parents, 15% chose parents and school administrators, 13% chose school boards and 12% didn't know.

After viewing the results of this poll, it is interesting to note that EPIE (1981) found that in a great number of many elementary schools, it is the principal who selects the major materials of instruction and he is frequently influenced by the amount of free materials that the company's representative is willing to spring for. The least and most common selection practice at the elementary level is for all teachers, or a good sized representative committee of teachers, to play a major role in the selection process.

Hypothesis

Based on the above, it was hypothesized that a new basal reading series is chosen every five years by New Jersey Township schools, that this is a result of an evaluation of various basal series by the teaching staff to determine the choice of the new series, and that a detailed questionaire is used as the basis for evaluation.

Definition

Basal series - A total reading program that reflects a philosophy about how reading should be taught and includes teacher manuals, readers and workbooks.

Assumptions

The questionaire will be filled out truthfully.

The size of the townships (large, small) should not affect the thoroughness of the evaluative procedure used in choosing a new basal series.

Limitations

A random sampling of townships in New Jersey will be used. The rate of number of returned questionaires cannot be controlled.

Delimitations

The study and conclusions cannot be extended beyond the population sampled since it is not representative of the United States.

Specific Procedures

There are twenty-one counties in the state of New Jersey and a total of 675 townships distributed throughout these counties. A questionaire was developed by the tester and mailed to four townships randomly selected within each of the twnety-one counties. A stamped self addressed return envelope was enclosed in order to facilitate the rate of return. The questionaires were mailed on October 7 and October 8, 1982. Fifty-eight completed questionaires were returned to the tester by November 6, 1982, indicating a return rate of 69%.

The questionaire concerned the frequency of change of basal series and the methodology and criteria utilized in the selection of the new series. The responses to the questions could be recorded by selecting and checking off the appropiate column. The Likert Scale was used to weigh the reponses accordingly:

a. strongly agree 5

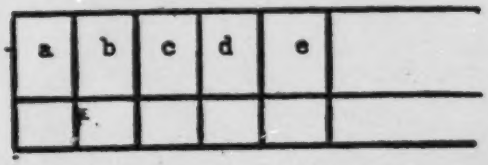
b. agree 4

c. undecided 3

d. disagree 2

e. strongly disagree 1

The response portion appeared as follows:



The questionaire, as seen in appendix A, consisted of 42 questions. The first question related to the frequency of change of the basal reading series and was answered by circling the correct year, which spanned from one to ten. The remaining 41 questions were based upon the methodology and criteria used in selecting a new basal series. The questionaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of 12 questions concerning the identification of personnel involved in the selection of the new series, the influence of teacher preference, and the format utilized for critical evaluation of prospective series. Part II, or questions 13 to 42 consisted of a detailed list of areas of concern when choosing a new series. These included: The book design (preface, introduction, glossary, pictures, illustrations, graphs); representation of various ethnic groups, age groups, handicapped, and male-female roles; word recognition skills; readability; comprehension skills; literal, interpretive, and critical comprehension levels; literary value; literary forms (poems, essays, plays); integration of stories with other areas of language development and curriculum areas (social studies, health, science); correlation of satellite materials with skills and concepts taught; the testing program; the record keeping program;

and the quality and thoroughness of the teacher's editions.

A statistical analysis of the responses will be calculated to determine how often a new basal series is chosen, if the choice is based upon an evaluation of the various basal series by the teaching staff and that a detailed questionaire is used as the basis for evaluation within the fifty-eight townships in the state of New Jersey.

Results

The results of the questionaire responses are reported in relation to the hypotheses of this study. Hypotheses One states that a new basal series is chosen every five years. Table 1 illustrates the percentage of the frequency of change of basal series over a ten year span and indicates the highest percentage falls within the fifth year,

Years	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	M	No Policy
Change	0	0	0	0	28	3	0	5	2	12	6.72	41
Review	0	2	0	0	3	2	0	2	0	0	5.22	

the modal year, but the mean number of years for a change is 6.72. It can also be seen that a review in some districts takes place every five years as noted by the mode and the mean.

Hypothesis Two: The results of an evaluation of various basal series by the teaching staff determine the choice of the new series. Table 11

illustrates the findings in respect to questions two through twelve, which concern the personnel involved in the choice of basal series. The areas of strongly agree, and agree, were combined, as were the areas of disagree and strongly disagree, in order to facilitate the representation of positive, undecided and negative responses. The results indicate that teachers prefer to be actively involved in the evaluation and choice of basal series.

Table 11

Responses to Questions Two Through Twelve in Percentages; Personnel Involved In the Choice of Basal Series

Question	% Agree and Strongly Agree	% Undecided	% Disagree
2. Teachers are involved in the choice of a basal series.	97	0	3
3. A representative committee chooses the new basal series.	76	5	19
4. Teacher involvement in the choice of a basal series is limited to reading teachers and reading specialist.	19	5	76
5. The series is chosen as an outcome of teacher preference, either written or oral.	80	7	13

Question	% Agree and Strongly Agree	% Undecided	% Disagree
6. The series is chosen as a result of an administrative decision using teacher preference as a guideline.	48	1	51
7. The series is based upon a decision of the reading specialist and administration.	12	5	83
8. The series is chosen strictly by administrative decision.	3	0	97
9. A specific written questionaire is used as criteria for the evaluation of the basal series.	67	16	17
10. Evaluation of the basal series is based upon verbal discussion.	52	12	36
11. Piloting with several series is used for final choice in the evaluation.	40	25	35
12. Presentations by sales representatives from various publishing companies have a ma-			

Question	% Agree and Strongly Agree	% Undecided	% Disagree
jor affect in the choice of a new series.	48	19	33

Hypothesis Three: A detailed questionaire is used as a basic for evaluation. Table 111 illustrates the findings related to questions 13 to 42, (see appendix A) which consist of a detailed list of areas of concern when choosing a basal series. A mean and standard deviation were calculated for each category. A comparison of the means obtained indicates that the townships questioned were in positive agreement with the proposed criteria.

It also demonstrated that the greatest response in the undecided category when choosing a new basal series was in questions 18, 21, 22, and 37. Question 18 related to authentic representations of the aged; question 21 related to choosing a series that favored a particular methodology of word recognition instruction; question 22 related to choosing a series that had an eclectic (varied) word recognition methodology; and question 37 related to lesson plans being contained in teacher's editions.

The questions that fell in the area of leant amount of disagreement or undecided behavior were questions 24, 27, 28, 38, 39, and 42. Question 24 referred to the readability of the stories reflecting proper grade levels; question 27 referred to questions and activities at

tion 28 referred to questions and activities at the end of stories that elicit thinking on a critical level; question 38 referred to teacher's editions containing optional instructional proceedures; question 39 referred to teacher's editions containing activities for a review of skills as well as new skills; and question 42 referred to teacher's editions containing suggestions for follow-up activities.

Questions 24, 27, and 36 fell in the category of the greatest agreement. Question 24 concerned choosing a series in which the readability of the stories reflect the grade levels; question 27 concerned having activities at the end of stories that would elicit thinking; and question 38 was concerned with teacher's editions containing optional instructional proceedures as well as specific proceedures.

Conclusions and Implications

Although many townships in the state of New Jersey do not have any set policy regarding a change or review of book series, the townships that do re-examine their series prefer to do this within the fifth or sixth year the series is in use. Teachers prefer to be and are actively involved in the choice of the new series and indicated many areas of concern when choosing a new basal series. A detailed questionaire was indicated as the mode used for evaluation.

The implications of this study would be quite meaningful for those townships who do not involve teachers in the choice of a basal series, and for those who evaluate without any formally based criteria in mind. Input by the teachers may lead to a happier, more integrated staff and

a choice of book series that best reflect the needs of the students as perceived by those actively involved in the task of education. Publishers may also take note of the criteria of concern to the teachers and strive to incorporate these needs within the series. If a book series meets the standards set by the teachers, then the need for change becomes minimal.

Criteria in Solution of New Texts:

Related Literature

Basal reading series are the instrument usually chosen to implement a developmental reading program. A basal series as defined by Chall (1967) is an attempt by publishers to give teachers and pupils a total reading program embodying a system of teaching and reading (in the teacher's manuals), a collection of stories and selections for pupils to read (the readers), and exercises and additional practice (the workbooks). Otto and Smith (1980) suggest that most of the major reading series in the marketplace reflect similar philosophies about how reading should be taught. Very simply, they help teachers teach children a vocabulary of words which they can recognize on sight; various word attack and comprehension skills; how to talk about stories, poems, essays, whatever; and how to use reading for information getting and for pleasure.

Ruth Robbins (1980), in discussing the basal reader, suggests that it remains one of the most important elements of the average American school program and quotes research studies which show that basal reading texts are used in 80% to 90% of American schools and represent the most commonly used approach to reading instruction in this country. She further suggests, because of the degree to which reading can control educational success, one cannot help but be impressed with the impact the basal reader has on childrens' lives and with the profound responsibility of those who must evaluate and select a basal reading seires. Sara Zimet (1969) adds that there has been a growing body of experimental data pointing to the tremendous impact the content of reading texts has on the child's lifespace.

Not only is the content of these first readers seen as a possible contributing factor in reading retardation, it is also seen as a transmitter of our cultural values and attitudes.

How great an input do publishing companies have in determining the content of the basal series? Robbins (1980) states that although there are over 150 educational publishers, the majority of basal text sales are generated by only a handful of those publishing companies and are greatly influenced by cost and censorship. The fact is that unless a publisher steers a careful course between the twin hazards of cost and censorship, a basal reading series may never reach the marketplace alive. James Squire, (1974) editor-in-chief and senior vice president at Ginn, at an IRA convention, contrasted the traditional methods of writing a basal reading series with new and emerging techniques. In the past publishers used authors, consultants, and noted authorities to establish the framework of a series, which was later fleshed out by the publisher's in-house staff. Modern publishers now begin by identifying learning needs, specifying outcomes, and designing an overall program to meet the needs of the students. With the expanded use of research and development, they have moved away from a concern for improvement of content to a focus on pupil performance. EPIE (1981) corroborates this by stating that whenever a textbook or any other material is developed, a great many important instructional decisions have been made by the developer/publisher about curriculum in general, and about how instruction in that particular material will be arranged. This would include decisions about

the goals and objectives; decisions about the scope and sequence of the content; decisions about what specific teaching and learning activities will be built into the material in order to facilitate the learning of the material's content by learners, and decisions about whether to build into the material a means of assessing a learner's progress through - and mastery - the material's objectives.

Because of cost and sales potential, publishing companies are greatly influenced by censorship. N.J.E.A. Review (1982) commented on a report based upon responses to a questionaire by 1,891 elementary and secondary school superintendents, principals, librarians, and library supervisors in which three-fourths of the respondents indicated that the rate of challenges had increased, and about one-third said that recent challenges had resulted in changes in books and materials or in the educational process. They suggested five points in dealing with the censorship problem: 1. School districts must first establish a written selection policy and a clearly defined method for handling complaints. 2. Education organizations can take strong stands to counteract the unnecessary censorship of reading materials. 3. Media specialists often read book reviews published in The Horn Book, New York Times, Kirkus, and Publisher's Weekly and other sources. 4. Librarians must work closely with school personnel - particularly English and reading teachers. 5. Books being considered for formal adoption as classroom texts by the school district should be on display at a central location for parents and school board members to examine before they are purchased. A card can be filled in giving

the viewer's positive response or objections for each book previewed. These notations should be carefully considered before the school district decides to buy books.

The N.J.E.A. Review article, in discussing censorship, also mentions a Texas organization known as the Education Research Analysts, consisting of Mel and Norma Gabler, who conduct their own reviews of books. "This couple was on a segment of "60 Minutes". Since many state adopt testbooks on a state-wide basis, an "imprimatur" from the Gablers is important as their influence is spreading nationally and they are being courted energetically by publishers." Larry Mikulecky offers a commentary in The Reading Teacher, in which he states that Educational Research Analysts wish to remove materials that contain any reference to the theory of evolution, the occult, sex education and any sexual connotation, and the always offensive four letter word. The result of this censorship, feels Robbins (1980), may cause the child to end up with an unrealistic view of life that is based upon the self-proclaimed "high standards" of a small group of educators who happen to be responsible for a large quantity of sales.

Who is to have the responsibility of choosing a basal series: A recent Gallop Poll published in Phi Delta Kappan (Sept. 1982) posed the following question: "Who do you feel should have the most influence of the selection of books for use in public school classrooms and school libraries - parents, school boards, teachers, or the principals and school administrators?" Of the national totals, 42% chose teachers, 18% chose parents, 15% chose parents and school administra-

tors, 13% chose school boards and 12% din't know. EPIE (1981) found that in a great number of many elementary schools, it is the least and most common practice at the elementary level is for all teachers, or a good sized representative committee of teachers, to play a major role in the selection process. However, twenty-six states have some form of pre-selection that is done at the state level leaving the final selection from among the state adopted (approved) materials to local committees.

How is the basal series chosen? Wartenberg (1977) suggests that in many cases, a good salesman can do the job single-handedly. In other instances bright colors, varied illustrative techniques and shapes and size become the determinants. Crowley (1977) advocates selection by a thorough process that ensures the success of the school's reading program. The ten areas gives priorities, weighted, and evaluated would include the skills program, composition and readability, concepts, balance, literary value, testing program, teachers's manual, supplimentary materials, field testing and publisher's reputation. Olson (1968) suggested using a checklist or a questionaire and has reported that he and his co-workers at Wayne State University have identified more than two hundred principles that could be used in selecting materials. Lory Johnston (1980) has offered a wide spectrum of areas to be considered for evaluation covering program authorship; program philosophy; readability of materials; content of materials; the way the program provides for development in such areas as phoneme and structural analysis, vocabulary comprehension, creativity, literacy

understanding and appreciation, language growth, study skills and acquisition of knowledge; student evaluation methods; teacher editions, and teacher aides (skills workbooks). Robbins (1980) warns, however, that the final selection or purchase must depend on the strength of the instructional program itself and must represent the most appropiate profile of features that will suit the schools particular needs.

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Appendix A

Appendix A

Table III

Findings Related to Questions Thirteen to Forty-Two:
Areas of Concern When Choosing a Basal Series

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
13.	165		72		9		4		2	
14.	95		96		21		6		5	
15.	90		72		24		0		4	
16.	125		104		15		0		2	
17.	135		92		12		4		2	
18.	105		84		36		2		3	
19.	115		80		33		4		2	
20.	140		92		12		2		2	
21.	100		56		39		14		4	
22.	85		76		30		18		3	
23.	110		104		18		0		4	
24.	150		92		3		2		3	
25.	135		100		9		2		2	
26.	125		100		12		2		3	
27.	155		96		3		0		2	
28.	150		96		6		0		2	
29.	160	M=137.3	68	M=82.8	12	M=14.8	6	M=4.07	2	M=2.43
30.	160	SD=29.09	76	SD=15.11	12	SD=11.10	0	SD=5.58	3	SD=1.17
31.	165		52		21		0		4	
32.	169		72		24		8		2	
33.	170		76		6		4		1	
34.	160		88		9		0		1	
35.	100		104		24		8		0	
36.	105		88		21		6		5	
37.	130		60		27		14		1	
38.	145		100		0		4		2	
39.	165		88		3		0		2	
40.	175		72		6		2		2	
41.	185		60		6		6		1	
42.	190		68		0		2		2	

Appendix B

Name of Town ship _____

County _____

Questionaire

Part 1

1. How often are reading basal series changed? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 years

The following answers will be weighted on a scale of 5 to 1.

a. strongly agree 5

b. agree 4

c. undecided 3

d. disagree 2

e. strongly disagree 1

	a	b	c	d	e
2. Teachers are involved in the choice of a basal series.					
3. A representative committee chooses the new basal series.					
4. Teacher involvement in the choice of a basal series is limited to reading teachers and reading specialists.					
5. The series is chosen as an outcome of teacher preference, either written or verbal.					

	a	b	c	d	e
6. The series is chosen as a result of an administrative decision using teacher preference as a guideline.					
7. The series is based upon a decision of the reading specialist and administration.					
8. The series is chosen strictly by administrative decision.					
9. A specific written questionaire is used as criteria for the evaluation of the basal series.					
10. Evaluation of the basal series is based upon verbal discussion.					
11. Piloting with several series is used for final choice in the evaluation.					
12. Presentations by sales representatives from various publishing companies have a major affect in the choice of a new series.					

Part II.

The following are areas of concern when choosing a new series:

13. A recent copyright date.					
14. A preface, forward, or introduction explaining the organization of the book.					

	a	b	c	d	e
15. A glossary.					
16. Contemporary visual materials, such as pictures, illustrations or graphs.					
17. Authentic representations of various ethnic groups.					
18. Authentic representations of the aged.					
19. Authentic representations of the handicapped.					
20. Authentic male-female role representations.					
21. A series will be chosen that favors a particular methodology of word recognition instruction.					
22. A series will be chosen that is eclectic (varied) in word recognition methodology.					
23. A series will be chosen in which structural analysis is taught as an aid to decoding.					
24. A series will be chosen in which the readability of the stories reflect the grade levels.					

	a	b	c	d	e
25. A series will be chosen in which the use of syntax and context clues are taught as an aid to comprehension.					
26. A series will be chosen in which questions and activities at the end of the stories will elicit thinking on a literal level.					
27. A series will be chosen in which questions and activities at the end of the stories will elicit thinking on an interpretive level.					
28. A series will be chosen in which questions and activities at the end of the stories will elicit thinking on a criteral level.					
29. A series will be chosen in which the stories are of literary value.					
30. A series will be chosen that includes variations of literary forms, such as poems, essays and plays.					
31. A series will be chosen in which the stories have application and intergration with other areas of language development.					

	a	b	c	d	e
32. A series will be chosen in which the stories have application and intergration with other curriculum areas, such as social studies, science and health.					
33. A series will be chosen in which the workbooks, study skill sheets and satellite materials correlate with the concepts and skills taught in the stories.					
34. Diagnostic tests are given for each level in the program.					
35. An informal testing program is included in the series.					
36. A record keeping system is included that is understandable and efficient.					
37. Teacher's editions contain lesson plans.					
38. Teacher's editions contain optional instructional proceedures as well as specific proceedures.					
39. Teacher's edition activities for a review of skills as well as new skills					
40. Teacher's editions contain activities for eliciting responses on all levels					

	a	b	c	d	e
40. of comprehension.					
41. Teacher's editions contain reproductions of the children's pages, along with instructional suggestions.					
42. Teacher's editions contain suggestions for follow-up activities.					